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ABSTRACT

A problem-solving exercise based on the principle of cooperative learning and designed for use in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom is described and demonstrated. The problem-posing method, which uses students' lives and problems as a focus of discussion in the second language classroom, is outlined. By using carefully selected words or pictures (codes), the teacher draws issues out of the students. The students are then asked to analyze these issues and arrive at solutions. The three parts of the method (listening, dialoguing, and action) and the five problem-solving questions are explained. The problem-solving exercise is then presented. The exercise uses a variant of traditional jigsaw, a formal cooperative structure of cooperative learning, the problem-posing technique, and the natural approach to ESL. The exercise is designed for students of intermediate fluency at the secondary school level. Using this exercise, team members receive a short story in letter form and must decipher and analyze the possible points of view expressed, paragraph by paragraph, in a 3-day procedure. The letter (problem) and a team worksheet are included. (MSE)

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PUTTING THE SHOE ON THE OTHER FOOT

A JIGSAW LESSON IN POINT OF VIEW

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THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative Learning is like religion. There is a basic premise from which everyone deviates. As the methods of Cooperative Learning expand and contract, we practicioners "look again". We are in a constantly expanding and developing state, a proper environment for an educator.

Our belief is that Cooperative Learning is an all-forgiving, awe-inspiring, powerful method which can be used by the "true believer", the "agnostic", and the "heretic". The foundation and structure of Cooperative Learning is sound enough to withstand variation. Different practicioners may question deviation from the published standards, but we feel that ultimate evalution must come from the classroom teacher.

If what you are doing seems not to be working, obtain more training, find a peer coach, or try a different cooperative approach . . . but, DON'T GIVE UP! Cooperative Learning produces valuable results, but these sometimes take a while to become visible. Spencer Kagan, one of the gurus of Cooperative Learning, once remarked that it would take five years to become "good" practicioners. We're on year three now, still stumbling, still fumbling, but still believing. We have had set-backs, and days when lessons fell apart, but we've seen the rewards of classroom cooperation too, and when we have a day when nothing has worked quite as we wanted or expected it to, we've picked ourselves up to try, try again. We're here to share what we have done with you and to learn more about cooperation in the process.

PROBLEM POSING

Developed by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, the problem posing method is an approach which uses students' lives and their problems as the focus in a second language classroom. By using carefully selected words or pictures (codes), the teacher draws issues out the students. The students are then asked to analyze these issues and arrive at solutions (Wallerstein, 1983). In analyzing and solving problems, the target language becomes indispensible to the student: "I need to understand these words to solve the problem." Self-esteem is bolstered by this approach as it suggests that people are in control of their lives, and that they can do something as individuals to make their lives better.

Problem posing has three parts: listening, dialoguing, and action. Before a teacher can select codes (words or pictures), she must listen to students in the classroom and in the community so that she can isolate their problems and strengths. Then she can choose a code that will evoke an issue relevant to students' lives. Dialoguing is the second part. This is a process where the teacher asks questions of students so that they will come to their own conclusions. It is critical that the teacher does not lead the students to an issue, but instead simply draws problems out of the dialogue. The problem posing questions are these:

1. What do you see?
2. What's the problem here?
3. Is this your problem?
4. Why is there a problem?
5. What can you do about this problem?

These questions can easily be adapted for written material by asking: What is this paragraph about? or What have you read about? As a caveat for those who have not used the problem posing process, question #3 is a high risk one. We have received a greater variety of responses and answers by changing it slightly to: Is this your problem or the problem of anyone you know? Adolescents seem more willing to respond if they can be once-removed from a high-risk question.

The last part of the approach is the action. Students are expected to take some sort of action as a solution to the problem. This aspect of problem posing allows students to exercise control in the classroom as well as in their lives.

The code used in this demonstration, CRAB SOUP AND KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN, grew out of an ESL teacher's experience. It was used as a source for the code because in most ESL classrooms, teachers and students do share their histories. The story does focus on a problem (or so we believe), but we have tried to leave it unstated and unsolved. This has been done so that students can come to their own conclusions about the stories. We believe that via problem posing and Cooperative Learning, an ESL class can evolve its own curriculum: vital, relevant, highly adaptable and flexible.

JIGSAW AT CATESOL

In this demonstration, we have combined Cooperative Learning methodology with Freire's problem posing technique and the natural approach in an ESL instructional setting. This lesson is designed for intermediate fluency students at the secondary level. It has been field tested at both Alhambra and Santa Paula high schools.

This CATESOL demonstration will utilize a variant of Jigsaw to teach the literary concept of point of view. The ultimate objective is to engage students in interactive communication, utilizing language as the medium for problem solving. The secondary objective is to demonstrate to students how point of view affects a narrative.

Traditional Jigsaw is a formal cooperative structure, most often used for "medium consensus, medium difficulty academic tasks such as mastering text material in the social sciences" (Kagan, 1986). In Jigsaw, a lesson is divided into four parts. Each member of a home team is given one of these parts to master. The member goes to an "expert" group; there he/she is joined by members from each of the other home teams. Each expert group cooperates on mastery of their common part of the Jigsaw. Upon mastery, the "experts" return to the home team. In turn, each expert shares his/her part, creating the whole in cooperation. Individual testing of the whole follows. Some traditional Jigsaw methods take the expert group a step further by suggesting that expert groups be built by ability: high, low, and middle. Materials are then prepared to match ability.

We call this lesson a Jigsaw variant because of some adaptations we have made in our method. After trying Jigsaw lessons in which ESL students were sent to expert groups of a predetermined difficulty level, we found that the "low" group was frequently unsuccessful. Often these students had poor social skills: these were the students who did not assume new roles quickly. They were often unable to check for understanding or offer encouragement. These were also students who had low academic skills. It was a fatal combination. For this reason, we utilize one "high" and three "average" expert groups. This division provides each expert group with balanced social and academic skills, and continues exposure of the "low" student to good models.

A PROBLEM POSED JIGSAW: POINT OF VIEW

Level: Intermediate fluency Time: 3 days
Secondary/Adult

PROCEDURE

DAY 1

1. Each home team member receives a copy of the code (a short story in letter format.
2. Using Freire's problem posing format, team members analyze the code paragraph by paragraph.
   a. Each team member reads the code.
   b. Together the team lists problems by using the following questions: What is the problem? Who has the problem?
   c. One member of the team makes the list.
   d. Each member copies the team list.
3. The whole class comes together to check comprehension.
   a. The teacher asks the teams (paragraph by paragraph), What is the problem? Who has the problem?

DAY 2

1. Teacher presentation and class discussions explain the concept of point of view.
2. The different points of view in the letter are brainstormed.
3. Home team members are assigned to expert group by color coded cards.
4. Expert groups are characterized by one high ability and three average ability teams.
5. Expert groups assemble.
   a. They receive worksheets which ask them to determine whether the problems are still problems from another point of view (they can use notes from home team).
   b. Points of view are assigned. These evolved naturally during the class discussion.
   c. They are instructed to construct a new code (letter) from the assigned point of view.
   d. Each expert takes the new code back to the home team.

DAY 3

1. Home teams reassemble.
2. Each expert shares his/her unique code.

3. The orignial code is problem posed again, in its entirety, instead of in chunks (by paragraph).

4. Final outcome: each team comes to a consensus on what the one problem is.

CRAB SOUP AND KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN

Dear Jan,

What a treat to get your letter! I laughed 'till I cried at your description of the field trip. Did Charlie's parents carry through on their threat to sue the school? Or you? All that over one wiggly boy falling out of an apple tree!

I've got a field trip story too . . . and now I know why everyone in the lunch-room looked at me so oddly when I said I was going to take my ESL class on a trip to the tide pools.

Though I call them my "kids", mine are a lot older than yours! The oldest told me (accidentally) that he was twenty-two. And I suspect that Loi is older than that because he always has a five-o'clock-shadow and doesn't socialize much with the rest of the group.

Anyhow, we went, or more accurately, some of us went to the Marine Life Sanctuary at Point Fermin. Everything seemed to go wrong. To begin with, when the school bus pulled up, it was raining. Not one of those spring drizzles: it was a real downpour. But, you know me! There I was in my yellow slicker, all rah-rah and ready to go, telling the kids not to worry, that we'd have a great time.

The next thing I remember was the bus driver pulled over to the side of the freeway, yelling at me. "Lady, some kid's smoking in the back of the bus." I stood up to see, and there was Loi, putting a cigarette butt on the floor. Smoke was still coming out of his nose as he grinned at me, his gold tooth winking!

When we got to the tide pools, the rain had nearly stopped, so I let everyone get off the bus while I went to fetch the guide. When I got back, half the class had gone. Just vanished! The bus driver pointed vaguely in the direction of a clump of palms, but I couldn't see anyone.

The rest of us went out to the rocks. One girl decided she had to return to the bus . . . the sight of so much heaving green water was making her sea-sick. Other kids began to race across the rocks, chasing each other with hermit crabs and bits of seaweed. The guide was talking about the pools, but no one seemed to be listening. Fortunately, the skies opened up, and in the pouring rain, we made a run for the bus.

HOME TEAM WORKSHEET

CODE:_____ POINT OF VIEW: _____

paragraph	topic	problems

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